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RUSSIAN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND

IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO

By

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Abstract

Recent events in Eastern Europe have raised serious concerns over the security situation on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) eastern flank. Russia's activities which shaped and enabled a successful annexation of Crimea with barely a shot being fired in 2014 were actually quite remarkable and forced NATO, and certainly non-NATO members in the region, to take notice. Russian influence activities should be regarded as a primary threat to the peace, security, and stability of Eastern European nations as these activities seek to manipulate information in a manner that distorts facts and confuses audiences, which then leads to decisions and actions taken that are often not rational; NATO's strategic communication (StratCom) should be seen as a comprehensive tool for meeting this security challenge and shaping a future security environment. Enhanced capabilities within the areas of social sciences to define and assess target audiences and promulgate messaging through media outlets, as well as enhanced development of the StratCom Center of Excellence (StratCom CoE) are critical to NATO's StratCom campaign as it seeks to leverage soft power on the European continent and further afield.

This paper asks what are the implications for NATO's StratCom given Russia's current actions with regards to influence activities in former Soviet Republics? Influence activities that make use of social sciences to identify and assess target audiences for multiple media outlet messaging is a facet of the hybrid tactics Russia uses to shape environments, and must be given high importance for NATO's success in the battle of the narratives. If NATO wants to "keep the moral high ground" through a strategic communication policy that is open and transparent, then additional personnel with extensive backgrounds in psychology, sociology, and anthropology are important elements. In the battle for the narratives, it is far more important to understand *how* people think, versus *what* they think. In understanding the *how*, we can influence the *what*.

Introduction

Russian influence activities directed against the West, and even amongst Russian domestic audiences, is not something new in terms of how the Kremlin seeks to apply elements of national power to achieve strategic objectives. However, since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the Kremlin has sought to regain the former power and prestige of a long ago empire. To accomplish this, influencing ethnic Russian audiences in former Soviet Republics to sway political decision-makers toward more Russian leaning initiatives is a key element of the Russian strategy. This strategy, (which was largely seen as a shaping effort for future activities), seeks to prevent former Soviet Republics whose ties to a former Russian empire run centuries from integrating into the European Union (EU) and NATO. What makes the Crimean annexation interesting is that influence activities in the form of Russian strategic communication (StratCom) were a *decisive element* of this operation. The Russians effectively applied StratCom lessons learned from their 2008 war with the Republic of Georgia in the preparations and actual annexation of Crimea, and used social media as a primary tool to spread misinformation to a wide audience in a very short amount of time. This demonstrated a skillfully coordinated and synchronized operation whereby non-lethal effects prepared the way for lethal forces, and supported the Russian narrative following the annexation.

Russian influence activities in the form of strategic communications (StratCom) are quite prevalent in former Soviet Republics, some of which are now NATO members. Information promulgated through StratCom has value and requires adaptations by strategic leaders and forces. It is an element of national power and is also a strategic, operational, and tactical level function that not only shapes environments, but has the potential to be decisive.

The manner in which Russian actions and events are influencing the decision making of populations and governments falls squarely within the concept of "hybrid warfare." Hybrid warfare seems to be seen as a new phenomenon that marks a paradigm shift in current warfighting doctrine. However, it is my belief that hybrid warfare is simply warfare, and that the *tactics* used in Russian influence activities should be seen as *hybrid* tactics. "Hybrid *warfare* is an alien concept in Russian military theory and in its approach to modern warfare; almost all Russian military analyses of the concept ascribe its existence and parameters to Western states."[1]

Many pundits would say that using social media within the context of information warfare constitutes hybrid warfare. I happen to find this to be simple semantics as the weaponization of social media is a tactic which falls under the waging of warfare. There really is little difference between the use of the early printing press in the 1700s, which the colonists used to print pro-independence material against the British, and the use of social media to inform audiences and, hence, influence populations. While the ways and means may change with the advent of new technologies, the ends essentially remain the same, and it begins with the ability to *influence* an adversary to submit to your will. In this respect, it can be argued that the level of brutality or even the necessity of open and lethal hostilities rests with how well we can influence through strategic communication. If our influence activities are successful, little force is required to meet strategic objectives; if our influence activities are not successful and we still need to attain strategic objectives, then the level of force needed may be exponentially greater. This was clearly illustrated during Russian activities to annex Crimea, (which required little force), and the Russian activities in Ukraine, where the level of force has increased exponentially since 2014.

Strategic Communication (StratCom) Defined

NATO's StratCom is an essential element of how NATO plans, develops courses of action, and executes training and exercises to deter, assure, or persuade a wide array of potential adversaries or audiences. It "is first and foremost a process that supports and underpins all efforts to achieve the Alliance's objectives; an enabler that guides and informs our decisions and not an organization in itself. It is for this reason that StratCom considerations should be integrated into the earliest planning phases."[2] In essence, it is that largely non-lethal force that NATO can apply, and which is essential in guiding a long term strategic vision. It informs the Alliance as to a cohesive NATO narrative, which is an extremely difficult task given the varying levels of interests and agendas from 28 member nations.

The U.S. Department of Defense referred to StratCom in Joint Publication 5-0 dated 11 August 2011 as the "focused USG efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of USG interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with and leveraging the actions of all instruments of national power. SC combines actions, words, and images to influence key audiences."[3] Whereas the U.S. DoD's "definition of the term *strategic communication* is vague and idiosyncratic in relation to the definitions of other agencies"[4], NATO's StratCom is defined as "the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities - Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (PA), Military Public Affairs, Information Operations (Info Ops) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), as appropriate – in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims."[5] NATO's StratCom takes into account the activities of Civil-Military Affairs, as well as political and legal advisors in an overarching umbrella to influence state and non-state

actors, through the coordinated and synchronized application of words and deeds to *achieve* desired strategic objectives.

Both definitions have a dilemma however, and that is *defining* key audiences. Whilst the U.S. definition seems simple enough, the fact of the matter is it is quite difficult. Target audience analysis and message promulgation varies greatly given a wide array of factors and should be based on the *effects* we want to achieve. Often times, this level of capability for proper target audience *analysis* simply does not reside in NATO HQs and has to be contracted out for support in order to fully define an audience, and attain a level of understanding in audience cognitive processes to determine the best method for influencing. Moreover, NATO psychological operations practitioners cannot plan operations on an adversary without expressed North Atlantic Council (NAC) approval, and yet this is a key component of NATO's StratCom.

Despite this, NATO has been able to identify and influence key audiences, such as political and military decision makers as well as populations, to an extent. For instance, when NATO conducts an exercise, there are key visuals of showing multinational soldiers engaged on maneuvers to demonstrate NATO interoperability, which is key when dealing with 28 nations. The desired effect is to instill confidence in the populations of NATO member countries, while deterring an increasingly aggressive Russia. However, this also brings to light another dilemma that StratCom practitioners often have, which is measuring the effectiveness of our StratCom campaigns.

Measuring effects in a non-lethal environment is an extremely difficult task as we can rarely tie a single training event or political sound bite to a specific effect achieved through StratCom. This has been the topic of much discussion in the StratCom community. Nonetheless, NATO must strive to link communication objectives to an overarching strategy that

will ensure NATO's credibility and legitimacy as it maintains an open and transparent posture within the international political arena. Ultimately, Alliance cohesion is seen as the center of gravity for NATO, so influencing attitudes to ensure this cohesion must be a priority for NATO's StratCom.

This is where we see a difference in the U.S. and NATO approaches to StratCom. When StratCom is a subcategory to public affairs, (as in the U.S. case), the dynamic tends to be more reactive in nature, yet when StratCom exists as an overarching umbrella of non-lethal capabilities, (as in NATO's case), the dynamic becomes much more proactive. A proactive process allows for StratCom to engage in attitudinal change of a target audience over a longer term, which is deemed far more important than changing just the behaviors of others in a shorter amount of time through a reactive process.

At the strategic levels where political entities are highly involved there is perhaps less of a distinction between StratCom and public affairs. However, at the operational and tactical levels, where strategic concepts have to be transformed into military activity, there is a greater array of channels for communicating NATO's posture, profile, position, proclamations, and use of force (percussion) in order to persuade an adversary. StratCom is not just about conveying words, sound bites, and images to an audience, but rather it is the coordination and synchronization of words, sound bites, images as well as *physical activities* to an audience in order to achieve the desired strategic effects. "From a practical perspective, StratCom is not so much a thing that is done; rather it is the outcome to be achieved."[6]

StratCom fits into the construct of public diplomacy and soft power, which "is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A smart power strategy combines hard and soft power resources, and requires an

understanding of the roles of credibility, self-criticism, and civil society in generating soft power. It tries to attract by drawing attention to potential resources through broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges, and so forth. But if the content of a country's culture, values, and policies are not attractive, public diplomacy that 'broadcasts' them cannot produce soft power."[7] This is why Russian influence activities tend to focus more on ethnic-Russian or pro-Russian minorities, and not national governments in the same fashion. Not every message resonates the same, which is why target audience selection and analysis becomes incredibly important. If a rift can be created and exploited using variations of the same message tailored for specific audiences, (such as government policy and decision makers, university students, and working class populations), then an opening may be created that enables an outside entity to influence or even seize power. Additionally, whereas the Russian strategy allows rapid target audience development at various levels, the NATO process does not fully support *specific* targeting of audiences. Rather, NATO will focus on a general population or grouping of political and military leaders, despite the targeting of specific audiences being more effective.

Let it be assumed that achieving strategic objectives without the use of force and only through persuasion is the most favorable outcome of any diplomatic process. Secondary to this would be the achieving of strategic objectives through coercion, and finally through the use of force. At the moment, the Kremlin has outpaced the West in regards to soft power development and implementation in their perceived spheres of influence as they have the capability to harness diplomatic, information, economics, and cultural aspects into a coherent narrative for messaging; whereas the West has difficulty harnessing these same aspects into a coherent narrative due to our insatiable appetite for immediate gratification, political turn-over, various national interests, and ideological differences. President Putin has spent nearly 25 years cultivating a soft power

approach to many of Russia's Eastern European neighbors and former Soviet Republics without having to navigate the political landscape of ensuring a cohesive narrative. As a result, NATO has much to do in order to communicate purpose and intent in no uncertain terms to a Russian power seeking "reimperialization", and to NATO members with significant concerns about an irredentist Russia.

Russian StratCom Strategy

The eastern flank of NATO is extremely sensitive at the moment, with little chance of conditions becoming any more stabilized or secure in the near term. Short of lethal activity to attain strategic objectives, it is largely NATO's non-lethal activities such as influencing through information that will either maintain a status quo, or help attain small victories while shaping conditions for any future decisive action. "Force now resides in multiple functions and in multiple domains, which means modern military leaders must think in more terms than just fire and maneuver. In addition, force is no longer just being applied against living forces, but against extensions of living forces. Force, in all its abstractions, is today applied through people, machinery, and things not visible to the human eye, such as the electromagnetic spectrum, digital networks, and radio waves."[8] This quote is especially appropriate given that the Russians recently published a new National Security Strategy and a new Military Strategy which is both comprehensive and identifies a need to use influence activities and information operations to shape the environment and create favorable conditions for achieving strategic objectives. For Russia, the strategic endstate of Moscow's policies is "reimperialization" with the means being the Russian people and compatriots, and the ways being through Russian StratCom activities. "Russian reimperialization policy trajectory starts with soft power and continues to humanitarian policies, compatriot policies, information warfare, 'passportization', protection, and finally

annexation."[9] This policy trajectory essentially places a lot of emphasis on StratCom and flows from other recent strategies from the Kremlin.

Russia's National Security Strategy released on 31 December 2015 identifies multiple real and perceived threats to the state and the Russian people. It also identifies the importance of information within the sphere of national security, and how their view in achieving information dominance may be nested in the fact that they see this as a real threat to themselves. "The intensifying confrontation in the global information arena caused by some countries' aspiration to utilize informational and communication technologies to achieve their geopolitical objectives, including by manipulating public awareness and falsifying history, is exerting an increasing influence on the nature of the international situation."[10] The strategy goes on to state that one of the main threats to public and state security are "activities connected with the use of information and communication technologies to disseminate and promote the ideology of fascism, extremism, terrorism, and separatism, and to endanger the civil peace and political and social stability in society."[11] This statement fits into a wider scope in terms of how the Russians see the world around them. NATO expansion to the east, and particularly into areas that were historically under the Russian sphere of influence, fans the flames of paranoia in a country that has, for good reason, been concerned about security along their western flank for well over a century.

The most notable differences between the Russian Military Doctrine of 2010 and 2014 specifically mention the need for increasing information operations in an attempt to exert and achieve influence external and *internal* to the Russian Federation. "It is important to bear in mind that the doctrine has two audiences: The internal Russian audience receives the message that all signs of social unrest in the state, as well as Moscow's role in the neighbourhood crises,

are the result of the West's unlimited geopolitical aspirations and of the activities of their foreign services, aimed at undermining the prestige of the Kremlin. For Western powers it sends a message that Russia's neighbourhood should be regarded as its sphere of influence, which Moscow is ready to defend, if necessary by all means."[12]

These documents identify critical roles for information warfare "in order to achieve political objectives without the utilization of military force and, subsequently, in the interest of shaping a favorable response from the world community to the utilization of military force. It is about using every possible means, lethal or non-lethal, in a blended way to confuse, surprise, immobilize, and eventually defeat an opponent."[13] In fact, it resembles what General David Perkins, Commanding General of the US Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), mentioned in a recent lecture at the Air War College when he said that winning in a complex world requires us to address new problem sets where maneuver from multiple domains will present multiple dilemmas requiring critical and strategic thinkers. In essence, the use of influence activities to destabilize and set conditions for future operations helps describe the future of Russian warfare, and is a key component of the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command's (TRADOC) description of the future.

Russia engages in similar forms of strategic communication in order to exert influence over a wide of array of audiences, and achieve their political objectives which "appear to be focused on creating a buffer between NATO and the West's encroachment on the Russian historical spheres of influence."[14] Their "information campaign and related military action corresponds to the characteristics of a new form of warfare where the lines between peace and war, foreign military force and local self-defence groups are blurred and the main battle space has moved from physical ground to the hearts and minds of the populations in question."[15]

Russia's StratCom campaign goes far beyond the capabilities for which NATO is comfortable employing. Their use of social media, psychological operations, and particularly cyber activities, overshadows NATO's abilities and has serious implications in Eastern European NATO member nations, and along the entirety of NATO's eastern flank. Moreover, their extensive analysis in identifying target audiences and projecting messages through traditional media outlets, such as TV, radio, printed news, and academic papers makes them exceptionally adroit. Russian mass media have played an important and instrumental role in bringing life to the key narratives, themes, and messages outlined in the strategic policy documents of the Russian Federation, or via the Russian political elite.

Turn the TV on in most European hotels and you will invariably find RT, which is Russian-state sponsored media putting its "spin" on current global events to influence audiences. Since messaging is more effective when there are elements of truth, they have essentially limited their spreading of outright lies to the masses in an effort to further their credibility and legitimacy, which is a crucial aspect of StratCom. Additionally, the Russians are extremely good at message manipulation, particularly since they are not operating within the construct of a larger alliance. This means that their ability to act and counteract to messaging outpaces that of NATO, which also correlates to their ability to exercise soft power through diplomacy.

Given Russia's activities in the Baltics, Ukraine, and other former Soviet Republics, many believe that Russia is already at war and we are not. In a recent interview with Admiral James Stavridis, former Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, he mentioned that 21st Century warfare would be "brain-on-brain" warfare. That seems logical enough, however the activities taking place which seek to influence a wide array of audiences can be clearly seen, and will

ultimately set conditions for future decisive success as Russia and the West continue to wrestle for dominance not just in Eastern Europe, but further afield.

Many of the debates and controversies surrounding Russian influence activities focus on the legitimacy and transparency of Russian activities. It is entirely rational and realistic to believe that Russia will attempt to influence activities within the countries that it shares borders, and across a wider reaching audience. We have to remember that "when the Soviet Union disintegrated, Russia lost not only its former colonial territories in Central Asia, but also lands and peoples that had been integral to Russia since its creation. Some twenty-five million Russians were left outside of Russia"[16] As a result of this, these countries clearly fall within the notion of a Russian "sphere of influence" however, Russian tactics, techniques, and procedures in exercising this influence often borders on what is considered legally, morally, and ethically accepted norms of international relations. When one nation attempts to subvert the sovereignty of another through the use of hybrid tactics designed to influence target audiences while maintaining plausible deniability on the fringes of conflict, it affects the perceptions of regional and, to an extent, global audiences.

Russian Influence Activities in former Soviet Republics

Reports of Russian activities in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine are widely circulated through the media however, what is not well known among western audiences are the various degrees of Russian influence activities that are taking place, (and have been taking place), in the Baltic region. In fact, it can be hypothesized that many of the Russian tactics, techniques, and procedures for the influence activities used in those two regions were actually developed and practiced in the Baltics. For several years, the Russians have been attempting to influence a wide array of audiences in the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania through unique and

creative means, which pose serious challenges for NATO. Specifically, if continued Russian StratCom were to destabilize the security situation Baltics, would NATO act to secure the region? The answer to this question is up for debate at the moment. While NATO would normally not interfere in the internal state security issues of a member nation, if "little green men" were to suddenly appear in Eastern Estonia, the dynamic would quite likely change dramatically.

The Russian state-sponsored Russian World, or *Russkiy Mir,* Foundation seeks to influence the Russian diaspora in the Baltics through soft power and is widely seen as an instrument of Russian StratCom and wider geo-politics. This foundation focuses on promoting Russian culture and language within the Baltics, and has even worked to establish educational exchanges for those in the Baltics wishing to study in Russia. Additionally, the foundation has formed pro-Russian political groups inside the Baltics to amplify Russian messaging and ensure that the disenfranchised ethnic-Russian minorities in the region have a tool by which to broadcast their grievances. Given the size of the Russian diaspora in the Baltics, foundations such as Russkiy Mir, and to an extent Russia House or *Russkiy Dom*, can have profound impacts on influencing ethnic-Russian minorities for pro-Russian interests.

There has been ethnic tension in both Estonia and Latvia due to their higher percentage of ethnic-Russians, but to what extent remains a bit elusive. The Kremlin views these people without a country because, while their citizenship may be Latvian or Estonian, their nationality is Russian. This line of thinking by the Kremlin is contrary to the "classical understandings of interstate relations and international law, whereby, a state may, indeed must protect its own citizens even when they live in other states. But it cannot legitimately claim to protect its ethnic conationals who live in another state and hold citizenship of that state."[17]

Instances like this provide a perfect opportunity for the Russians to exploit these grievances of their compatriots, by enacting legislation that provides Russian passports for ethnic-Russians in the Baltics. In doing so, it legitimizes Russian claims to being defenders of ethnic-Russians abroad and enhances their status among the disenfranchised in these regions. This tactic propels forward Russian interests in the region by supporting groups of Baltic nations' citizens that can then influence their national governments. Any legislation passed under pressure in the Baltic nations to diminish ties with NATO and/or the EU, and allow unfettered Russian access to vital seaports like Tallinn and Riga would be huge strategic wins for the Kremlin leadership, and could ultimately pave the way for more irredentist activities. In non-NATO member countries like Ukraine and Georgia, the Russian strategy is to continue the instability through non-lethal and lethal means in an effort to prevent EU and NATO integration, which both countries desperately want. In essence, the compatriots in former Soviet Republics have been skillfully used as a tool for Russian foreign policy by the Kremlin.

Implications for NATO in Countering Russian StratCom

Indeed, the security situation across the Baltics and Ukraine have grown tense over the years through Russian StratCom campaigns designed to leverage their elements of national power against weaker states in an effort to support Putin's irredentist desires. "In terms of state-based challenges, Russia's purported annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine demonstrated a sophisticated combination of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic means to achieve objectives below a threshold that the Russian leadership believes would elicit a concerted NATO response."[18] So what should NATO do? At what point do elements of a StratCom campaign cross the threshold of NATO's Article V requiring NATO forces to aid another member?

As the debates and controversies continue over "what's next" with regards to Russian influence activities, it is interesting to see who is, or is not, heavily involved. Certainly the leadership in the Baltics are concerned as well as Poland, but the mood is less concerning with national level leadership in some Western European nations who see Russian activities as something that's happening "over there". Interestingly, some Eastern European nations do not seem to be too concerned, but many are also reliant on Russian energy and trade so perhaps it is a façade to keep from essentially "rocking the boat". This poses an interesting dilemma for the EU and the NATO Alliance – if some nations are concerned and others are not, how does NATO react?

For the moment, NATOs adaptation and assurance measures have become paramount to its StratCom campaign at a critical point in time when NATO seeks to strengthen its position in the Baltics and prevent further unrest in non-NATO Eastern European nations. The StratCom objectives of "demonstrating the effective adaptation of Allied Command Operations (ACO) to new threats and challenges; assuring NATO members and partners of the Alliance's continuing resolve and ability to defend its members and contribute to international stability and security; and preserving Alliance cohesion and public support for NATO's operations and missions,"[19] help guide NATO StratCom activities. While assurance measures are focused on building confidence in NATO capabilities and commitments to member nations, adaptation measures are focused on evolving the NATO strategy to threats that have emerged in the 21st Century. Both require a significant StratCom approach that focuses on the overarching long-term strategic effects we want to achieve, with short-term and intermediate objectives that may be more regionally focused; the combined effort thus supporting the long-term strategic effects.

There are three areas that may help in achieving this level of understanding and focus within NATO's StratCom community. "First, and foremost, we need to broaden and expand the minds of all our people, from the strategic corporal to those who will command and lead. We therefore propose a wholesale broadening of western military education programmes."[20] Gone are the days where a soldier may simply think of himself, (or herself), as a machine gunner or rifleman. Soldiers need to understand what desired effects are trying to be achieved and how to best influence a populace or situation in a manner that achieves those effects without immediately resorting to lethal action. This can only be achieved through training programs that develop the skills for our personnel to think and communicate strategically. By achieving effects through non-lethal activities, we enhance political will and maintain credibility and legitimacy for our endeavors. As we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, these are key components required if we are to see expeditions through to a successful end. Consequences of a "strategic corporal" acting in a manner inconsistent with Western values and beliefs can have significant effects and influence key decision-makers. Think of the incidents at Abu Ghraib prison and the international backlash on U.S. policies in prosecution of the war.

The NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany provides personnel going to StratCom positions with a one week course to prepare them. As many NATO StratCom practitioners have not always operated within the non-lethal specialties that comprise NATO's StratCom; it is clear to see that this is woefully inadequate. A StratCom course consisting of an in-depth focus on target audience identification, measures of effectiveness, and theme and message development would be extremely beneficial particularly if it could be exported to tactical and operational levels.

The second area focuses on seeing "the expansion and professionalisation of certain key information-age enablers – notably information, media, and psychological operations practitioners."[21] This should be taken further in order to help us understand how people think, so that we may better influence what they think. To assist in this endeavor, the recruitment of psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists would be of great benefit. The U.S. model of a Human Terrain System (HTS) and the U,K,'s Defence Cultural Specialist Units were founded from lessons learned in the Vietnam War, and were re-instituted during the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. These teams are comprised of social scientists and military personnel that are sent to conduct extensive study and interaction with a local populace in order to learn their culture, determine their decision-making processes, and then recommend to a commander the best method to achieving a non-lethal desired effect through the application of StratCom. The battle for the narrative may be communicated through a variety of mediums, but the human terrain is where opinions will be formed, decisions made, and actions taken. Hence, recruiting specialists in the social sciences to serve in NATO HQs would greatly benefit in countering the Russian strategy and ensuring support for NATO.

Other academic backgrounds that should be recruited to serve in NATO's StratCom community are those with history, information technology, and international relations degrees. History helps us to understand the deeper contextual background for how Russians think and act, while those with comprehensive understandings in information technology could greatly assist in managing and analyzing the various social mediums that have profound influences on populations and decision-makers. International relations is perhaps at the foundation for the curriculum at the NATO Defense College (NDC) in Rome, Italy and could assist with

determining the best soft power approaches required to achieve desired effects in the various regions of NATO.

The third focus is to build and "expand a research capability"[22] that can identify target audiences, analyze their decision making processes, develop messaging for specific audiences, and determine our effectiveness at communication delivery and effects. To shore its position in the east, NATO has taken extensive measures to counter the Russian StratCom campaign through a research center. The creation of the NATO Strategic Communication Center of Excellence (StratCom CoE) was an adaptation measure, which officially opened its doors on 20 August 2015 in the Latvian capital of Riga. Today, the center conducts analysis and study of Russian information and influence activities, and provides those results through extensive lectures and articles to European and NATO leaders on what can be done to counter the threat. Additionally, they provide extensive training to NATO strategic communication practitioners in identification of Russian influence activities, and subsequent development of strategic communications to counter the Russian strategy.

The research division at the NDC in Rome, Italy provides another avenue from which we can apply academic rigor toward tough and unique challenges that NATO faces, particularly within strategic communications. This division of the (NDC) is composed of several academicians who interact with the StratCom CoE in Riga as well as StratCom practitioners at the various NATO HQs in order to gain an understanding of not just what Russia is doing with regards to soft power, but what NATO should be doing to counter adversarial messaging. Despite these unique abilities and activities of the StratCom CoE and NDC; there is more that must be done within the construct of an open, transparent, democratic, and western approach to countering Russian threats.

Any attempt to block or censor the media activity emanating from Russia only serves the Russian strategic communication narrative. Western values of freedom of speech and freedom of the press have made their way to Eastern European countries. Globalization and easy access to alternative media outlets makes it difficult for governments to monitor and control what messages are conveyed. Even here in the U.S., I have the ability to turn on my TV and watch RT, BBC, Al Jazeera, or switch on the computer and surf websites that take multiple issues and attempt to mold the narrative to fit the intended objectives, be they political, economic, or other. If we espouse freedom of speech and freedom of the press then how can we possibly control messages to ensure information is accurate and factual? This is a dilemma for which many nations and institutions, including NATO's StratCom CoE are wrestling with to this day.

The implications for Eastern European nations, and particularly NATO as a whole, require a coordinated and synchronized approach to narrative development and delivery. It requires a broad effort by commercial media agencies to recognize and speak truth to events. Notwithstanding the inherent difficulties of having 28 NATO member nations, all with national and regional interests, attempting to synchronize their messages to a wide array of audiences; it is something that must be done to ensure Western credibility and further legitimize future training and operations.

NATO's approach to assuring member nations lies chiefly through the tangible and visible application of StratCom tailored to the specific interests of target audiences of the alliance. "What NATO's activities on the ground 'communicate' are critical to building and maintaining support by populations and governments alike."[23] This is extremely important given the various security challenges which the alliance currently faces. What resonates with the people of Latvia may not resonate with the government of Greece so understanding what's

important to alliance members and then crafting a meaningful message takes careful planning. For instance, an increase to Baltic air policing assures the populations and governments in the region that NATO is present, ready, and able to defend against Russian aggression, while an increase to maritime policing activity in the Aegean Sea assures Mediterranean NATO countries that NATO is actively working to alleviate pressures stemming from the worst humanitarian crisis since the end of World War II – the migration of hundreds of thousands from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe.

The decision to place a U.S. Armored Brigade Combat Team in Poland is another example of an assurance measure designed to inform and bolster support among Eastern Europeans and deter further Russian aggression. While a Brigade Combat Team may seem a small gesture, and has often been mentioned as a "trip wire" approach to Russian aggression; it symbolizes the commitment of the U.S. to NATO, which communicates volumes to populations because they know it is not just about the U.S., but a whole of NATO approach if they are attacked. Additionally, the positioning of additional forces shores up support because it inevitably means improvements to regional economies, and infrastructure, which in turn influences populations to see NATO in a positive light.

Recommendations

NATO's approach to StratCom needs to ensure that the themes and messages which we desire to communicate are developed through a process that incorporates a "whole-of-headquarters" approach towards leveraging soft power so that we effectively influence target audiences to achieve strategic objectives. This approach to StratCom must nest within the construct of a long term vision for achieving strategic objectives, not just in the immediate vicinity of NATO, but further afield as well. In developing a long term strategic vision, NATO

political and military planners can then develop, coordinate, synchronize and implement a StratCom campaign that effectively communicates NATO intent to various target audiences.

Determining specific target audiences is a daunting task and should be broken to regional segments where gaining a specific understanding of how people think, and how they make decisions, is absolutely critical in determining the best methods for influence. With NATO being comprised of 28 member nations, each with unique customs, histories, and outlooks, we need to determine specific way for ensuring message promulgation resonates across overarching themes. The ground exercises taking place in the Baltics and in Poland send a clear message to those populations with regards to NATO capabilities and commitments. While the naval operations in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas send clear messages to NATO's commitment of crisis management, which is one of its three core tenants. To take this further requires an analysis of our effectiveness.

Measuring StratCom effects is extremely difficult when looking through a long-term lens because it is difficult to determine if a specific communication event generated the desired effect, or was it other factors acting in concert with the communication event that generated a desired effect. Additionally, results of communication events are rarely instantaneous and may take weeks or months for a desired effect to manifest itself. Even then, it is difficult to determine if the effects where linked to a specific event. Adding additional personnel to NATO HQs' StratCom offices that take overarching guidance from the Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) at NATO HQ in Brussels and then work to develop short-term and mid-term StratCom objectives at regional levels that support the StratCom endstate promulgated by PDD is crucial in helping to break the challenges into manageable pieces.

The level of understanding and knowledge required to develop and implement a StratCom campaign within a long term strategic vision necessitates the need for additional training and education by political and military planners in soft power approaches that influence various audiences without the use of force. More training throughput at institutions like NATO's StratCom CoE, the NATO School's Strategic Communication Course in Germany, and the NATO Defense College could greatly assist in this capability gap. Additionally, a greater understanding of human psychology, sociology, anthropology, history, information technology, and international relations are of paramount importance, particularly if we are to engage in the "brain-on-brain" warfare that Admiral Stravidis spoke.

Russia is at war, and NATO needs to become just as adroit at leveraging soft power to achieve strategic objectives and endstates. We absolutely want to influence people and decision makers, and one of the best ways is through professionally executed StratCom campaigns that are open and transparent about NATO desires. In doing so, we risk little in terms of not being seen as credible or legitimate in our activities.

Conclusion

"Russia continues to take information warfare to a new level, working to fan anti-US and anti-Western sentiment both within Russia and globally. Moscow will continue to publish false and misleading information in an effort to discredit the West, confuse or distort events that threaten Russia's image, undercut consensus on Russia, and defend Russia's role as a responsible global power."[24] The research, development, and implementation of Russian StratCom had proved to be a decisive tool in shaping environments for future Russian activities in the Baltics, Crimea, and Ukraine. "Analysis of the Ukraine conflict suggests that NATO and the EU must adapt to the new reality where information superiority, as opposed to military power, is

becoming increasingly important."[25] Truly, Russian influence activities must be regarded as a primary threat to the peace, security, and stability of Eastern European nations as they seek to manipulate information in a manner that distorts facts and confuses audiences which leads to decisions and actions taken that are often not rational; NATO's StratCom must be seen as a comprehensive tool for meeting this security challenge and shaping a future security environment.

The emphasis that Russia has placed on its ability to shape future conflict through influence and information warfare in recent years requires a coordinated and concerted response from NATO. The Russian National Security Strategy sends a clear message that this use of soft power to achieve their strategic objectives is how they will operate in the future. We've seen their success in Crimea and are feeling their effects in the Baltics and Ukraine. To effectively deter Putin, NATO must increase its ability to leverage the various 28 nations' instruments of national power in a coordinated and synchronized effort to ensure success against an irredentist Russia.

The incorporation of multiple fields into an overarching umbrella of strategic communications has enabled NATO to essentially coordinate and synchronize themes, messages, and actions to influence audiences across a wide spectrum of operations. It allows NATO to be proactive in determining future StratCom requirements, but also requires additional assets to ensure message precision.

At the moment, NATO's ability to effectively conduct target audience selection and analysis, as well as analysis of our measures of effectiveness is severely lacking. To fill the gap requires an education program that emphasizes strategic communications as a primary tool to achieving non-lethal effects at the lowest levels of the NATO structure. It requires the

recruitment of personnel with specific backgrounds that can assist in understanding how people think, so that we may influence what they think in terms of support for Western values, beliefs, morality, and ethics. It also requires as coordinated and concerted effort among various research forums that not only identify what the Russians, (or any other adversary), may be doing with regards to StratCom, but how NATO can better close capability gaps with regards to target audiences and measures of effectiveness. Additionally, we have to realize that this is the best option for dealing with Russia, as a turn to hard power and military solutions in dealing with issues, particularly in Ukraine, will only escalate tensions with potentially disastrous global results.

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